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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a method for increasing the pool of potential African-American educational researchers. The approach, called Researching Teachers in Residence (RTR), provides opportunities for inservice and preservice teachers to engage in collaborative research with university-based staff and faculty. RTR was started at Grambling (Louisiana) State University in 1988 and involves: (1) allowing inservice teachers access to the research skills of university personnel in order to investigate problems observed in the classroom; and (2) exposing preservice teachers to the formal inquiry method by having them formulate research questions, analyze the literature, conduct research and data analyses, and interpret the results. Research questions can be generated by students, inservice teachers, or faculty. RTR is characterized as a socially based research group, and its advisors concentrate upon turning the questions as posed into viable studies without losing the focus of the original question. Results of the RTR model provide evidence that inservice teachers and undergraduate preservice teachers can engage in research that increases the knowledge base, and that changes have taken place in attitudes toward research and knowledge of the research process. Future directions are explored. (Contains 11 references.) (JDD)

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Researching Teachers in Residence: Bringing More Minority Teachers and Preservice Teachers into the Research Arena

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RESEARCHING TEACHERS IN RESIDENCE: BRINGING MORE MINORITY TEACHERS AND PRESERVICE TEACHERS INTO THE RESEARCH ARENA

Rationale

Frierson (1990) wrote that African-American educational researchers are an endangered species. He based his argument on issues of isolation, lack of mentoring and nurturance, and exaggerated expectations by colleagues. Additionally, the numbers of African-Americans receiving Ph.D.'s each year has actually declined from 1977 to 1992 (National Research Council, 1994). Moreover, there are other equally distressing issues. First, the number of African-American teachers continues to decline towards a projected five percent of the teacher workforce by the year 2000. Considering that many educational researchers begin their working careers in the classroom, this is indeed a sobering thought. Second, many teachers often are not provided with the necessary philosophical and experiential background to critically analyze research, much less engage in it. Consequently, not only is the pool of potential researchers getting smaller, but those educators in the pool are not being given the necessary foundation to make the most of their numbers.

Frierson (1990) presented ten suggestions for mentoring and increasing the scholarship capabilities of African-American faculty and new Ph.D.'s, yet only one of his ten recommendations addressed the dwindling number of potential educational researchers. I intend to present one method for increasing the pool of potential educational researchers. Researching Teachers in Residence (RTR)

was started at Grambling State University in 1988 by Dr. Gwendolyn Trotter and has spawned groups at the University of Tennessee at Martin, and Loyola University of Chicago, with a new site being planned at Florida A & M University. The primary purpose of RTR is to provide opportunities for inservice and preservice teachers to engage in collaborative research with university based staff and faculty.

Theoretical Framework

The idea of using teachers as educational researchers became widespread in the last decade. In fact, educational agencies have called for a greater collaborative effort between universities and schools in formulating and conducting educational research. However, a true and equal collaboration is difficult for several reasons. First, teachers are rarely regarded as decision-makers; instead the view is that teachers are decision implementers (Kincheloe, 1991). Second, teachers and researchers often do not share the same interests. Third, many inservice and preservice teachers have little or no training in educational research (Schecter & Parkhurst, 1993; Trotter & Simmons, 1992). This leads to a perception, particularly among minority preservice teachers, that research is something in which "others" engage.

Teacher research has generated ideological issues on several fronts. Schecter and Parkhurst (1993) provide a good overview to the divisions in the field. First, both teachers and university-based researchers question differences between teacher-based and

university-based research in the areas of "best" questions, procedures, methods of data collection, and analyses. Second, there are divisions within both groups concerning the goal of teacher research. In short, there is discussion as to whether the primary focus of teacher research should be teacher empowerment, social change, or professional development (Schecter & Parkhurst, 1993). I believe that neither issue is important for minority teacher researchers. Instead, the focus must be on successfully gathering a core of research knowledge--whether quantitative or qualitative, positivist or post-positivist. In short, when a teacher knows that s/he has successfully conducted one study, s/he will be much more likely to learn the skills necessary to conduct another study.

Furthermore, it is difficult to separate teacher empowerment and social development from social change in minority teacher researchers. True knowledge should lead to questions. Questions should lead to alternative ways of conceptualizing and treating problems irregardless of whether the problems are seen in the classroom or in policy decisions. These alternative methods should lead to further professional development and social change--or at least enhanced consciousness (Brause & Mayher, 1991). Therefore, the latter issue should be viewed not as mutually exclusive outcomes, but rather as an interconnected "empowering catalyst for change" in both inservice and preservice teachers.

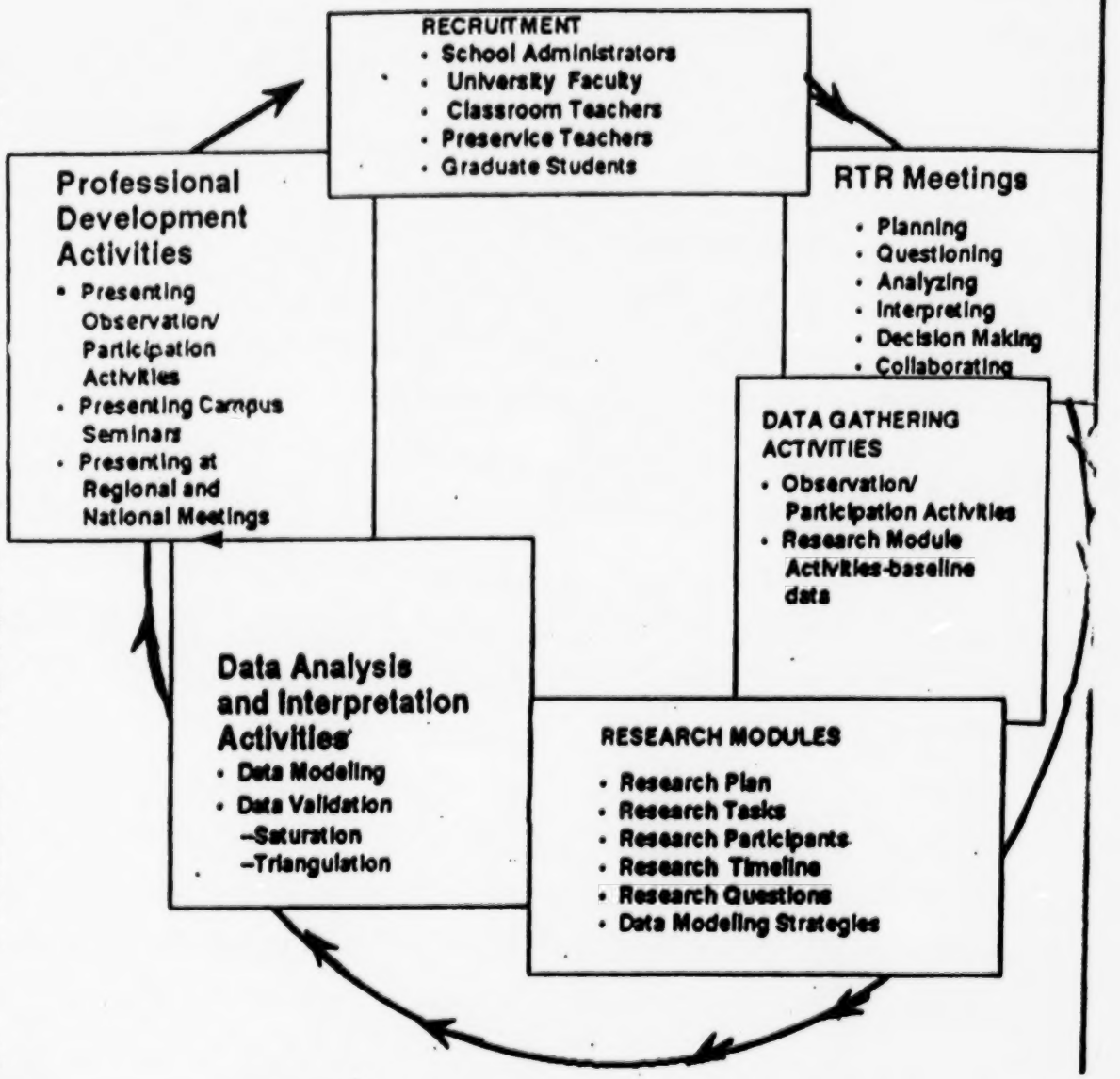
Researching Teachers in Residence (RTR) was started at Grambling State University in 1988 to challenge these beliefs by

implementing a multidimensional model. The first component of the model was designed to allow inservice teachers access to the research skills of university personnel in order to investigate problems observed in the classroom, and explore alternative methods of conceptualizing a problem or method. The second component of the model was to expose preservice teachers to the formal inquiry method by participating in the formulation of research questions, analyzing the literature, conducting the research and data analyses, and interpreting the results. Trotter expected that familiarity and success with the research process on the part of teachers would: 1. increase the likelihood of greater collaboration between universities and school systems; 2. help preservice teachers acquire a "core of research knowledge" (Trotter & Simmons, 1992, p. 3); 3. develop decision-making and problem-solving competencies applicable to research arenas in preservice and inservice teachers; and 4. produce a larger pool of future minority educational researchers (Trotter & Simmons, 1992). The conceptual model can be seen in Figure 1.

Method of recruitment and inquiry used in RTR

RTR is an open organization. The only selection criteria is an interest in research. Membership is open to undergraduate and graduate students, inservice teachers and faculty. Inservice teachers in the area usually contact the group if they have ideas for innovations or problems that they have observed in the

Figure 1. Researching Teachers In Residence Model



reprinted from Trotter & Simmons (1992)

classroom. Most new preservice teacher members enter through the professional laboratory experiences component of the teacher education department, although members have joined through word-of-mouth, interest in a specific topic, interest in a particular research process, or even dissatisfaction with the current interpretations of research pertaining to minority students. Occasionally, students are exposed more formally to RTR through the "Introduction to Teaching", "Educational Psychology", or "Diagnosis and Evaluation" classes. More research needs to be completed on the characteristics of students who stay with RTR.

RTR research questions can come from one of three sources. It can be student generated, generated by inservice teachers, or faculty generated. RTR has utilize both quantitative and qualitative research methods, dependent upon the type of question being posed. The advisors concentrate upon turning the questions as posed into viable studies without losing the focus of the original question. The experience becomes one of learning about research by actually conducting it from beginning to end. Therefore, studies proceed from ideas to determining the most effective methodology, to data collection, to analysis and interpretation. The data collection is conducted by both RTR members and other undergraduate students (which often acts as a powerful recruiting tool). The data is analyzed using appropriate statistical or narrative methods, according to the type of research question asked. Interpretations are usually the results of insights plus dialogues with other RTR members.

RTR fosters collaboration between the university and school systems by: 1. inviting inservice teachers to present ideas for research and guide the preservice teachers in the investigation of the question; and 2. inviting the participation of university faculty as researchers and advisors. While RTR engages in formal research, its structure is informal to foster ideas in a supportive setting. In fact, RTR can be characterized as a socially based research group. The informal social setting used to discuss methodology or ideology is viewed as an important part of the learning process (Vygotsky, 1962).

The informal setting has other benefits for members. First, research ideas and questions are viewed almost as community property, and high praise from the group for an individual's idea is a willingness to volunteer to assist with the planning, data collection, or analysis. Second, members are encouraged to find their own niche. Some members are more comfortable assisting in other projects than in presenting ideas while others are autonomous and use the group for feedback. Third, formal training in methodology is adapted to the social group setting; therefore, it is concise and has immediate applicability. By using the outline format, we have been able to introduce educational research vocabulary, and ideas about structure and methodology (e.g., see Appendix A). Fourth, the informal setting frees the research team member(s) to make mistakes without blame. Problems in methodology are noted by the members, and plans made for follow-up studies that will address the shortcomings of the original effort.

Results

There are two levels of results of the RTR model. The first is in the direct analysis and interpretation of data from the teacher and preservice teacher generated research projects. These projects have been presented to the university community as well as to national conventions. These provide evidence that inservice teachers and undergraduate preservice teachers can engage in research that increases the knowledge base.

The second level of result is within the RTR framework. These results center on attitudes toward research, knowledge of the research process, and utilizing knowledge gained from the process in formative and summative evaluations to enhance future research endeavors.

Outcomes and future directions

RTR exists outside of the traditional classroom and curriculum framework for teacher preparation, yet it draws upon and enhances both. Through its design and mentoring process, it allows inservice and preservice teachers to formulate questions about aspects of education based upon their experiences or learning, and enrich that knowledge by investigating these questions. These investigations can provide a fresh perspective of the educational process, and the identify new areas for research based upon an alternative perspective. The knowledge base is thereby enhanced in the areas of teacher education, minority education and teachers, and teachers as researchers.

We would like to see RTR move in three directions. First, we have added a statistician as co-faculty advisor to enhance both our research methods and our statistical analyses. Second, we are hoping to add the option of more qualitative research to address those concerns that do not fall neatly into quantative or positivist conceptualizations. Third, we want to move RTR more into the "mainstream" of the preservice teacher's professional experience without losing the social contact and informal atmosphere that may have been one of its most successful characteristics.

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